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Khomeinism: The Impact of Theology on Iranian Politics



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A Research Paper



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November 1983*

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A Research Paper

This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office
of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. It was
coordinated with the Directorate of Operations. [redacted]

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Comments and queries are welcome and may be
directed to the Chief, Persian Gulf Division, NESA,
[redacted]

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Khomeinism: The Impact of Theology on Iranian Politics

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Summary

*Information available
as of 1 October 1983
was used in this report.*

Ayatollah Khomeini's concept of an Islamic state and his style of governing have deep roots in the traditions of Shia Islam. Efforts by Shia clerics to implement an Islamic state in Iran, however, have been encumbered by divisions within the clerical community over government policy, levels of clerical involvement in government, and the course Iran should follow after Khomeini dies. The consensus of the US Intelligence Community is that the Iranian religious leaders will remain in power over the next several years despite these divisions. Consequently, even if Khomeini dies soon, the domestic and foreign policies of the Iranian regime, the structure of the government, and the focus of factional disputes will be defined by Shia dogma and tradition. Similarly, we believe that the opportunities and constraints facing the United States and the USSR in Iran will be determined by the strengths of the various clerical factions and the different political systems they propound.

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Khomeini draws much of his political philosophy—in particular, his central concept that religion and politics are inextricably united—from a long tradition of “activist” Shia clerics. The activists have argued for deep clerical involvement in politics to establish a “just” theocratic state. During several brief periods in Iranian history, activist Shia clerics have established theocracies or dominated secular Iranian rulers. The clerics who now control Iran's Islamic Republic draw inspiration from their precursors.

Activists, however, have not been the leading force in Shia Islam for most of the 14 centuries of its existence. Instead, Iran's religious life has been dominated by quietist clerics who advocate indirect clerical involvement in politics or no involvement at all. The quietists focus on their religious role and argue for accommodation with secular authorities. They believe that clerics should supervise the government, but they do not insist that the actual governing power belongs to the clerics. “Grand” Ayatollahs Khoi, Marashi-Najafi, and Shariat-Madari and many of Khomeini's other leading clerical opponents tend toward the quietist tradition.

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Khomeini's public statements emphasize his aim to revitalize the will of Iranians and all Muslims to form just states based on religious law and led by clerical jurisprudents like himself. We believe that, as a result, any Iranian regime led by clerics in the activist, Khomeini tradition will have a reformist, even revolutionary, view of other, “un-Islamic” states in the region. Such a regime will also want to spread its views worldwide to all peoples “oppressed by imperialism.”

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Although Khomeini denigrates the quietists as "court mullahs," his political philosophy also embodies important aspects of the quietist tradition. Shia histories show that his arguments for clerical guardianship over all aspects of Iranian daily life spring from the religious authority established by quietist clerics nearly 400 years ago. Moreover, Khomeini's establishment of clerical councils to review legislation and select his successor implements quietist proposals put forward earlier in this century.

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Khomeini's charisma and ability to combine the activist and quietist traditions into a comprehensive political philosophy made the Iranian revolution possible. Khomeini's followers have used his background and personality to create an image that plays on strong Shia religious emotions and links him to the idealized early Muslim period. Khomeini alone among senior Iranian clerics also was able to relate his interest in relations between the state, the clergy, and the people to contemporary events in a comprehensive manner. Official biographies show that his academic studies on topics rarely covered in Shia seminaries enabled him to broaden his political thinking, and his relations with older activist clerics gave him a firm background in activist politics.

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The Iranian clerical establishment is now engaged in an intense internal struggle over the future of Shiism in Iran. The activists, led by Khomeini, are trying to ensure that their influence survives him. They emphasize the revolutionary aspects of Shia Islam and the Iranian revolution. They view Western influences as mortal threats to Islam. To strike out at the West, the activists support good relations with Moscow and "anti-imperialist" forces worldwide, but they are not pro-Communist. Comparisons of the programs of various Iranian political groups show that the activists also have co-opted much of the left's domestic proposals.

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Khomeini's quietist opponents regard the activists' interpretations of many of his ideas as heretical. The quietists' public statements focus on the religious elements of the Iranian revolution. They reject close ties with Communist states and want to use Western technology to rebuild the economy, but—like the activists—they are wary of allowing Western influences in Iran. We believe the quietists played a major role in the regime's recent crackdown on the Tudeh Communist Party and in Iran's cooling of relations with the USSR.

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[REDACTED]

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The course of the Islamic Republic depends to a large extent on how the Iranian clerics manage the succession to Khomeini. We believe that none of the activist clerics—including Ayatollah Montazeri, who may be Khomeini's choice as successor—has the necessary seniority, political commitment, and broad acceptance to succeed him as “guardian” cleric. The weight of Shia tradition and, probably, of numbers within the clerical community favors the quietists. This suggests that “Khomeinism” will be diluted after the Ayatollah's death in favor of collective clerical leadership at the top and, possibly, a greater role for laymen. [REDACTED]

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We believe the grand ayatollahs may well enter the succession process in an effort to modify the regime's ideology in favor of less clerical involvement in running the government. Just as the death of the predominant Shia cleric—a quietist—in 1961 freed Khomeini and other anti-Shah activists, Khomeini's death would allow the grand ayatollahs, who are all generally quietists, to exert their own still-considerable influence over the Iranian people. [REDACTED]

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The quietists have stayed in the background for the most part since 1979, but recently, grand Ayatollah Shirazi, ayatollahs in Mashhad and Esfahan, and possibly even grand Ayatollah Khoi have sponsored demonstrations against the government in Iranian cities, according to the Iranian media. We believe such activities, if continued, would present a serious challenge to the activist clerics and would be especially threatening after Khomeini's death. If Khomeini, who is 83, can outlive his widely respected peers—all in their 80s or 90s—activists who back the doctrine of a “guardian” cleric will face less authoritative quietist challenges. [REDACTED]

Regardless of the balance of power that emerges, we expect a post-Khomeini regime to remain highly ideological and especially wary of relationships with any superpower. But the ground rules for Iranian ideology defined by Khomeini dictate particular enmity toward the United States. Consequently, for the near term after Khomeini's death, the ruling clerics are most likely to focus on marshaling their strength at home and abroad against perceived threats from Washington. Although the Soviets probably would have little influence on Iranian policies, Moscow would continue to benefit indirectly from the clerics' aversion to the United States. [REDACTED]

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Shia Religious Sites

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Tabriz: Large Shia religious center. Base of support for grand Ayatollah Shariat-Madari. Site of serious anti-Khomeini demonstrations by Shariat-Madari's followers in late 1979 and early 1980.

Amol: Approximate site of 14th-century theocracy and 20th-century leftist "Sarbedaran" dissidents crushed by the Khomeini regime.

Mashhad: Second only to Qom as an Iranian Shia religious site. Location of Eighth Imam's tomb. Senior clerics there, including grand Ayatollah Shirazi, oppose the Khomeini regime.

Baghdad: Base of the four "deputies to the Imam" who ended the succession of Shia charismatic political-religious leaders in the 9th century.



Qom: Foremost Iranian Shia religious center. Major clerics live permanently or spend many years there. Expanded and revitalized in 1920s with financial aid from bazaar merchants. Grand Ayatollah Golpayegani, Marashi-Najafi, and Shariat-Madari oppose Khomeini.

An Najaf: Site of 1,000-year-old predominant Shia religious center. All serious clerics study and/or teach there. Khomeini there in exile 1965-78. Grand Ayatollah Khoi opposes Khomeini.

Esfahan: Large religious center. Site of quietist-inspired demonstrations against the Khomeini regime 1982-83.

Karbala: Site of Third Imam's "martyrdom" in the 7th century. A major Shia religious center.

Khomeyn: Birthplace of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Shiraz: Large Shia religious center.

Sabzevar: Approximate location of 14th-century Sarbedaran theocracy.

Khomeinism: The Impact of Theology on Iranian Politics

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Iranian clerics, whether they support or oppose the Khomeini regime, are preoccupied with Shia history and religious law. This ensures that the regime's domestic and foreign policies, the structure of the government, and disputes within the clerical establishment are defined by interpretations of centuries-old doctrinal guidelines.

The Roots of Clerical Activism

Ayatollah Khomeini's books and speeches show that the essence of "Khomeinism" is his view that Shia clerics have for centuries sold out to temporal authority in order to advance themselves materially. In so doing, the clerics have abandoned a Muslim's principal religious duty—establishing a just state. In Khomeini's view, such a state must be based on religious law and can only be led by a religious jurist like himself. All other forms of government are illegitimate and must be opposed by faithful Muslims as religious duty.

Our problem is people who wear turbans, have read a book somewhere, and have joined the state to fill their bellies or increase their authority . . . These false saints prevent Islam from exerting its proper influence.

According to Khomeini, the source of the basic error in Shia theological development lies in rivalries between political "activists" and "quietists" that can be traced back to the origins of Shia Islam. Statements published in the Iranian media show that disagreements between contemporary activist and quietist clerics are profoundly affecting the political development of the Islamic Republic. In the eyes of traditional-minded quietist clerics, the essence of Khomeinism is a heretical "innovation" in Shia doctrine.

¹ Ayatollah Khomeini, *Islamic Government*, c. 1970.

Origins of the Activist and Quietist Traditions

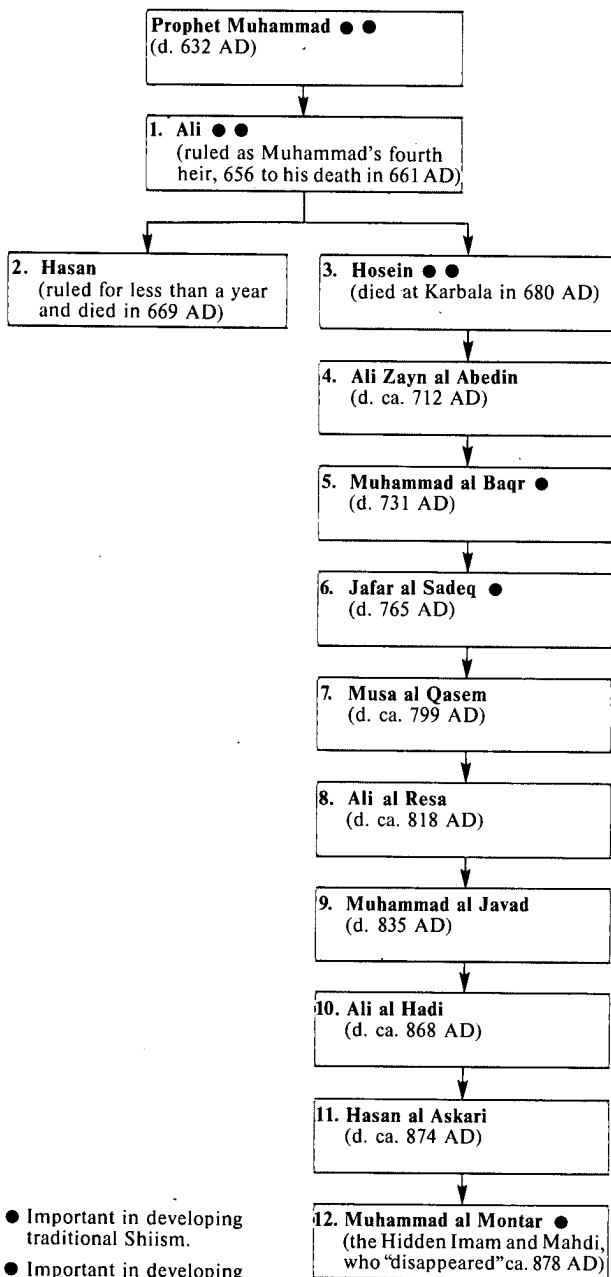
Histories of Islam show that Shiism sprang from a split in the early Muslim community following the death of the Prophet Muhammad. A minority—known as Shiiat Ali (the party of Ali)—revolted against Muhammad's immediate successors, who were backed by the Muslim mainstream, the Sunnis. The rebels believed that Muhammad had designated Ali, his son-in-law and the first male convert to Islam, as his heir. These rebels represent the "activism" that Khomeini admires.

Activists focused on the duty of successive generations of Shias to create a "just" government headed by Ali or one of his male descendants. Shias recognize a series of 12 such infallible, charismatic leaders—the Imams. Khomeini's supporters exploit Iranian nostalgia for the early Muslim period by referring to him as "deputy to the Imam" or simply as "Imam".

The activists saw the Imams as combined religious and political authorities but emphasized the right of the current imam to seize political power. Activists probably considered that any man selected to be an imam had a religious duty to lead a rebellion; however, all but the First and Third Imams kept relatively low profiles, according to experts on Islam. The later Imams were imprisoned or otherwise isolated from their followers by Sunni rulers even if they did not publicly assert their claim to rule the Muslim community.

Histories of Islam also indicate that a quietist strain has opposed activism from the beginning of Shiism. Quietist beliefs relieved Shias of the risks of challenging a secular ruler. They taught that Shias should instead await the return of the Twelfth Imam as the *Mahdi*—a messiah-like figure—who would create a perfect government on Earth. Quietists also rejected a

Figure 2
The Shia Imams



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Their doctrine focused on a depoliticized conception of the Imams that minimized the activism of the Prophet and the First and Third Imams. Quietists invested the "martyrdom" of the Third Imam, Hosein—by the forces of the Sunni ruler at Karbala, Iraq, in 680 A.D.—with strong and appealing symbolism designed to foster popular accommodation to all temporal authority. Imam Hosein became an intermediary who enables powerless believers who mourn him properly to receive favors from God, according to quietist Shia scholars.

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When Khomeini's followers began to preach activism to lower class Iranians in the 1960s and 1970s, they wanted to submerge the quietist view of the Shia Imams. Clerical propaganda from that period illustrates how they adapted concepts and terms used by popular Islamic leftists to redefine the Third Imam. In the activist interpretation, the Third Imam was a charismatic political-religious leader who selflessly struggled against overwhelming odds to set an eternal example of how Shias should react to oppression. Pro-Khomeini clerics compared Khomeini with the martyred Imam and said the Shah was like the Sunni ruler who deceived and killed him. Ironically, the lower classes were receptive to the activists' propaganda partly because job opportunities created by the economic boom under the Shah had for the first time given poor Iranians some financial and psychological independence.

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Many influential Iranian clerics—including all of Khomeini's peers among the Shia "grand" ayatollahs—are quietists who believe clerics should influence the government but not become involved in day-to-day politics. Quietists have publicly accused pro-Khomeini activists of perverting Shiism.

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But Shia quietism also contributed to Khomeinism, despite the quietist rejection of a direct clerical role in politics. Its legacy was the creation of a clerical hierarchy with broad authority over believers and a far-reaching system of religious organizations. These were crucial to Khomeini's arguments for clerical rule and, we believe, to his followers' ability to establish control throughout Iran.

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Rise of the Shia Jurisprudents

When the Eleventh Imam died without an obvious successor around 874 A.D., four prominent Shia scholar-merchants in Baghdad claimed to speak for the Twelfth Imam—allegedly a young son of the dead Eleventh Imam—who was voluntarily in hiding. According to histories of Islam, they assumed the title of “deputies to the Imam” previously applied to men responsible for communicating with imprisoned Imams. Khomeini has appropriated the same title. The four deputies hoped to make peace with the ruling Sunni regime and suppress permanently all activist claims to charismatic Shia leadership. They asserted that the Hidden Twelfth Imam told them he wanted Shias to tolerate temporal authority until he returned as the Mahdi. [redacted]

Research by a variety of scholars shows that Shia scholars, who began to write down the sect’s oral traditions in the 10th century, firmly established quietist dominance by omitting texts defining the Imams’ right to exercise temporal political power. They focused instead on the Imams’ role as religious guides, on their acquiescence in Shia accommodation with temporal authority, and on their exceptional knowledge of religious law. Khomeinism depends on the recognition of modern-day jurisprudents as heirs of the Imams’ legal knowledge. [redacted]

As quietist scholars wrote the Imams and Shia activists out of Shia daily life, they created a greater collective role for clerics as the guardians of Islamic law. By the time the last “deputy” died, religious jurisprudents had become an elite, unwilling to allow any one man to monopolize religious authority and privileges. Histories of Islam note that quietist doctrine firmly excluded any legal expert from claiming charismatic authority by insisting that clerics remain fallible no matter how learned they become. In fact, a hallmark of Shiism had been its refusal, until Khomeini came to power, to insist on a single correct interpretation of doctrine. Khomeini’s calls for “unity” among the clerics become—in the mouths of his most radical followers—implications that he is infallible. Quietist clerics, therefore, consider these calls heresy. [redacted]

Quietist scholars and jurisprudents further repressed activist tendencies by restricting the clerics’ right to use inferential reasoning to interpret Shia doctrine to meet contemporary problems. But, by the 12th century, day-to-day needs of the Shia community and an emerging clerical hierarchy led the most senior jurisprudents to reassert their right to make such inferences. Major developments in Shia doctrine followed, according to academic experts on Islam, such as the rationalization of the Twelfth Imam’s disappearance and of Shia relations with other Muslims. Khomeini’s justifications of clerical rule in his book, *Islamic Republic*, could not be made without such inferential reasoning. [redacted]

Institutionalized Shiism in Iran

The tensions between the Shia clergy and the state that have characterized modern Iranian history began with the establishment of a strong Shia government in Persia under the Safavid dynasty in 1501. The new rulers made Shiism the state religion to foster political and cultural unity in their domain, according to academic researchers. A wealthy, influential religious class quickly emerged that played a broad role in daily affairs. Clerics were integrated into national and local government as judges, educators, and administrators of religious foundations that controlled large revenues. Many became landowners, and some intermarried with the royal family, according to academic experts on Shiism. Some used gangs of thugs—the predecessors of the Khomeini regime’s *hezbollahis* and Revolutionary Guards—to enforce their decrees. In return, members of these private armies were allowed to plunder the possessions of their victims. Critics of the Khomeini regime argue that such activities have become routine under the current Iranian Government. [redacted]

As the Safavids stabilized their control, however, they needed fewer of these clerics whom Khomeini disparages as “court mullahs.” Experts on Islam have written that those who had no attachment to the Safavids gradually became a separate scholarly, quietist elite that rejected any accommodation with a

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Early Shia Theocracies

Several small and short-lived Shia theocracies appeared during the mid-14th century. The most important is the Sarbedar state (1338-81) in what is now northeast Iran. The Sarbedaran—literally “those who put their heads in a noose” (and expect execution if their fight against oppression fails)—were inspired by a Shia cleric who, like Khomeini, taught mysticism. His successor, an activist cleric, led a peasant uprising that created the Sarbedar ministate. The link established between activist mystic religious leaders and activist lay brotherhoods created the type of coalition that brought to power the first Shia rulers in Iran and later gave Khomeini political influence. [redacted]

Sarbedar rhetoric contained phrases—such as “corrupt on Earth” and “waging war against God”—that became Shia watchwords and are now among the ruling clerics’ labels for domestic opponents. The government-controlled Iranian television system has announced that it is producing a miniseries on the Sarbedar rising, which it labels “one of the most popular Iranian revolts springing from a spiritual leader.” [redacted]

A leftist opposition group crushed by the Khomeini regime in 1982 tried to exploit the Sarbedar name. It operated on the Caspian coast near where another short-lived 14th century theocracy was set up by a direct ancestor of Khomeini’s peer, grand Ayatollah Marashi-Najafi, a quietist. [redacted]

regime they defined as illegitimate despite its profession of Shiism. The members of this elite took little direct part in worldly affairs but were recognized by the Safavids as the true guardians of Shia values. They also were popular with the people, who expected them to use moral force against official injustices. Eventually, some of these scholars called for a council of senior clerics to supervise the government.² The

² This concept emerged repeatedly in Shia clerics’ later political programs. It was included in the 1906 constitution but never implemented. Clerical councils finally took shape in the Islamic Republic’s Council of Guardians—which reviews all legislation to ensure it conforms with religious law—and the two Assemblies of Experts—to draft the constitution and to choose Khomeini’s successor, respectively. [redacted]

scholars and court mullahs debated many of the issues that divide the Iranian clerics today—legitimacy of a regime before the Mahdi returns and the proper extent of governmental powers, for example. [redacted]

A group of strict quietist clerics, called Akbaris, emerged in the late 1500s, in reaction, we believe, to the increasing authority of the court mullahs, whom they perceived as too involved in worldly affairs. Akbari quietists dominated Shia thinking until almost the end of the 18th century. Their influence over the Persian populace was strengthened by lucid and authoritative interpretations of sacred texts, according to academic experts on Islam. These were written in the late 1600s by a leading theologian, Ayatollah Majlesi, who—like Khomeini—appealed to the common man in simple Farsi rather than clerical Arabic. His books incorporated all acceptable popular religious practices, thereby ensuring for the first time clerical authority over all aspects of religion. The broad clerical authority that Majlesi established gives legitimacy to Khomeini’s assertion of the religious “guardian’s” right to control all facets of Iranian life. [redacted]

In the late 1700s a rival group with activist tendencies, called Usulis, emerged among Shia scholars in Iraq and deposed the Akbari clerics, in part by intimidating them with thugs. Usuli doctrine led to a resurgence of clerical involvement in temporal activity and to occasional calls for a theocracy. [redacted]

The Usulis expanded clerical authority by requiring all believers who were not expert in religious law to follow the guidance of a clerical “source of imitation.” Shia tradition has, generally speaking, allowed individual believers to choose the senior cleric to whom they will be loyal. But the Iranian media show that activist Khomeinism has increasingly focused on loyalty to Khomeini alone. [redacted]

Clerical finances were strengthened by the Usulis’ authorization to collect special taxes previously considered to be in abeyance until the return of the Hidden Twelfth Imam. Academic experts agree that the financial independence from the Iranian state that

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this tax revenue gave to 20th century Shia clerics was one of the factors that allowed them to challenge the Shah.³ [redacted]

Toward the Revolution

After the Shia Qajar dynasty took power in 1795, the penetration of Iran by Western influences triggered a struggle for power and influence between the clerics and the state that climaxed almost 200 years later in the fall of the Shah. Histories of modern Iran show that many of the themes in Khomeini's political philosophy originated in clerical confrontations with the government under the Qajars. [redacted]

At first the struggle to preserve Islamic values from Western corruption seemed to go in the clerics' favor. Senior clerics forced one Qajar ruler to resist Russian border incursions and toppled several provincial governors at about the same time. Clerical influence increased later in the 19th century, when the power of the Qajar government did not extend far beyond the capital. Some of the most senior clerics even gained veto power over appointments to high-level state positions, according to Iranian historians. Shia scholars in Iraq, meanwhile, were arguing that all laymen and lesser clerics should be loyal to one supreme Shia cleric. We believe this doctrine strengthened the theoretical basis for the centralized clerical leadership that is crucial to Khomeini's ideology. [redacted]

Clerical championship of the interests of landowners and merchants increased during this period. Ties with the lower classes remained tenuous. The clerics interceded with the government on behalf of bazaar merchants hurt by Western competition and property owners offended by the behavior of Western infidels in Iran. The strong support for the "oppressed" lower classes characteristic of Khomeinism was alien to clerics of this period. According to Iranian historians, the conditions of workers on property owned or managed by the clergy were usually worse than that of workers under lay masters. [redacted]

With increased power came greater clerical involvement in political activity. The broad range of activist and quietist clerical support for the first Iranian mass

³ Shia taxes include general alms, one-fifth of annual income, and an optional amount—originally to be paid to the current imam. [redacted]

movements against foreign encroachment is well documented by historians. These protests led to ratification of the first Iranian constitution in 1906 and the election of the first legislature the following year. [redacted]

Initially, most clerics supported a constitutional monarchy and expected to influence the legislative process. Like the quietist Shia scholars some 300 years earlier, they advocated formation of a council of senior "guardian" jurists with veto power over legislation to ensure its conformity with religious law.⁴ Westernized lay reformers agreed to write a council into the draft constitution in return for clerical backing of basic civil rights. Successive governments refused to implement the provision, and such a council was not formed until 1980 under the Khomeini regime. [redacted]

The minority of clerics who opposed constitutional government saw all modernization as a threat to Islamic values and clerical interests. One, Ayatollah Nuri, had activist tendencies. He was eventually able to turn almost all the clerical community against the constitution—partly by the now traditional tactic of using thugs against his opponents. [redacted]

Historical records show that Nuri presaged many of Khomeini's charges against the state. Nuri attacked uncontrolled adoption of foreign values and customs, which he said led to the state's denigration of Islam, the clergy, and traditional Shia values. He called for clerical supervision of the press to prevent it from fostering the corruption of youth and women. Nuri also vehemently opposed granting equal rights to Iran's ethnic and religious minorities. He supported the monarchy, not because he believed it had any inherent legitimacy, but because the clerics were familiar with ways to manipulate it. Official clerical biographies indicate that one of Nuri's closest associates later became Khomeini's first theological instructor. [redacted]

⁴ Many ambitious clerics were elected to Iranian legislatures before the Islamic Consultative Assembly was formed in 1980, but they participated primarily as individual politicians rather than as guardians of clerical interests, according to Iranian historians. [redacted]

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Clerics on the Defensive

Lay reformers:

*... want your efforts and blood, but do not want Islam or yourselves.*⁵ [redacted]

The struggle between the state and the clerics intensified significantly after Reza Pahlavi assumed the throne in 1925, according to histories of modern Iran. The new Shah saw the religious establishment as an obstacle to his plans to modernize Iran and to replace popular loyalty to Islam with allegiance to a territorial state and the royal family. He tried to break the clerics' power by stripping them of judicial and educational authority and taking control of the religious endowments and their immense revenues. Protests led by clerics were put down harshly. The clerics' strong links with bazaar merchants, however, prevented the Shah from moving against the newly established clerical center in Qom. [redacted]

For 20 years after Reza Shah was deposed in 1941, his heir was unsure of his powers, and the clerical establishment regained some of its lost influence. In the 1950s most clerics supported the new Pahlavi Shah against Prime Minister Mossadeq, who advocated major social reforms damaging to clerical interests. Ayatollah Borujerdi, then the dominant Shia cleric and a quietist, was privately critical of many official policies but flatly opposed involvement by activist clerics in political affairs, according to Iranian historians. [redacted]

In 1960, when the Shah felt confident, he, too, moved against the clerical establishment. The government reduced clerical control over the religious foundations and closed religious publishing houses. Security forces infiltrated gatherings at mosques, and intelligence or military officers took charge of major religious shrines. Clerics who protested were arrested, interrogated, imprisoned, tortured, or executed. Clerical biographies published in the Iranian media show that many of those who were harassed and imprisoned later assumed leading positions in the Khomeini regime. [redacted]

Borujerdi's death in the early 1960s removed a major quietist restraint on activist politicking. No cleric was powerful enough to succeed him, and Khomeini emerged as the clerics' most outspoken advocate. [redacted]

⁵ Khomeini to fellow clerics in the 1970s [redacted]

Khomeini: The Charismatic Leader

We believe without Ayatollah Khomeini the Iranian revolution would not have occurred and the Islamic Republic would not have been founded in 1979. His personality, background, and style of expression were as important as his ideas in bringing him to the forefront of contemporary Iranian politics. No other contemporary Iranian has equaled his ability to capture popular emotion or to win the support of disparate factions. No other cleric provided a programmatic analysis of threats to clerical interests and an alternative to accommodation with temporal authority. [redacted]

The first evidence of Khomeini's activism came in the early 1940s when he published a book on Islam and government that was critical of Pahlavi rule. Official biographies indicate that his views had been influenced by his father's death at the hands of a Qajar official and by his own contacts with Shia clerics who had fled British rule in Iraq in the 1920s. Khomeini had also witnessed the dramatic reduction in clerical prestige and revenue caused by the Pahlavi secularization of the Iranian judiciary in the 1930s. His interest in relations among the clergy, people, and state was fed by his study of ethics, philosophy, and mysticism. These studies exposed him to Muslim, Greek, and Christian philosophical concepts rarely covered in Shia seminaries. [redacted]

But we believe it was the young Khomeini's close contacts with two older clerics who had activist tendencies that focused his thoughts. Khomeini first studied under a close colleague of Ayatollah Nuri, the impassioned opponent of constitutionalism and modernization. Somewhat later, Khomeini became very close to Ayatollah Kashani, a political sophisticate and activist, who we believe may have served as his role model. Both Nuri and Kashani have been extolled in the media of the Islamic Republic. [redacted]

Kashani's biography indicates that he cut short a brilliant academic career before achieving full senior clerical rank. Instead, he became involved in protests on behalf of clerical interests against the secular government and foreign influences first in Iraq and

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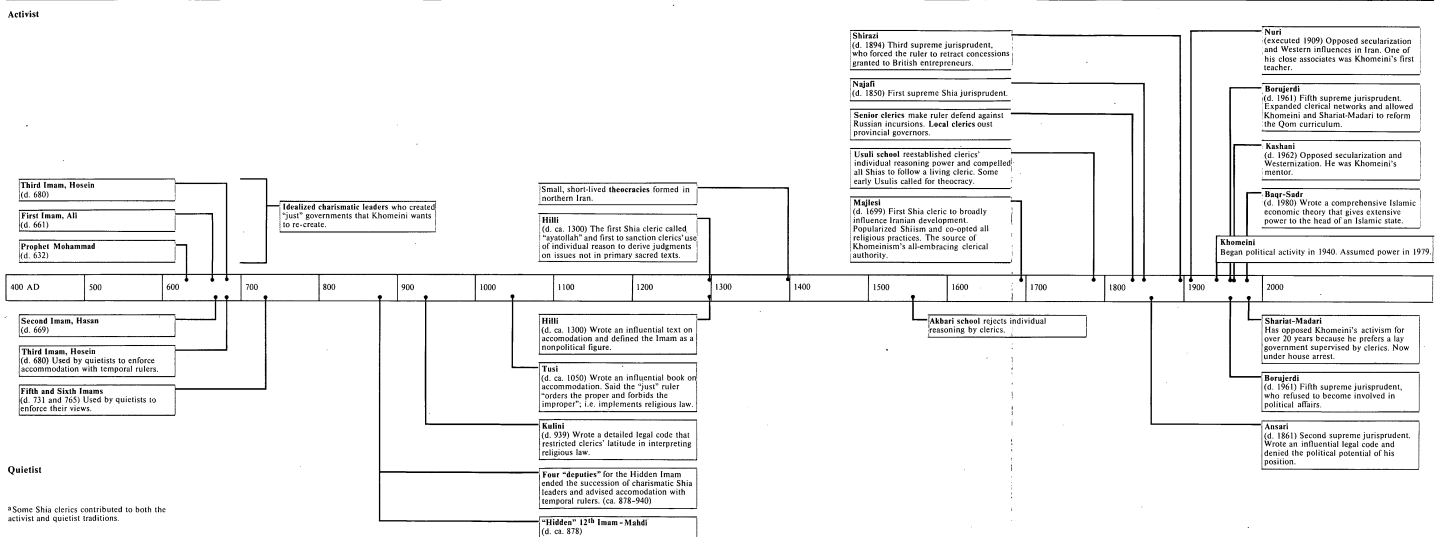
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Figure 3
Selected Shia Activist and Quietist Elements *



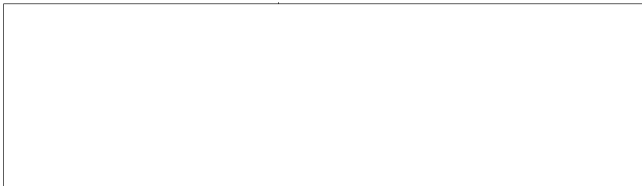
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Khomeini's Charisma

Khomeini's supporters have drawn on his personality and background to link him to the idealized period at the beginning of Shia history and to create emotional bonds between him and the Iranian people, according to Western scholars. Khomeini's radical supporters compare him with the Prophet Muhammad and the First and Third Imams to suggest that he has special qualities like theirs that command believers' obedience. Since 1970 they have reinforced these comparisons by addressing Khomeini as "deputy to the Imam" and "Imam"—a technically correct term for a Shia leader. These titles border on heresy when used by the most extreme Khomeinists, who imply that Khomeini has the special charismatic powers of the 12 Imams.



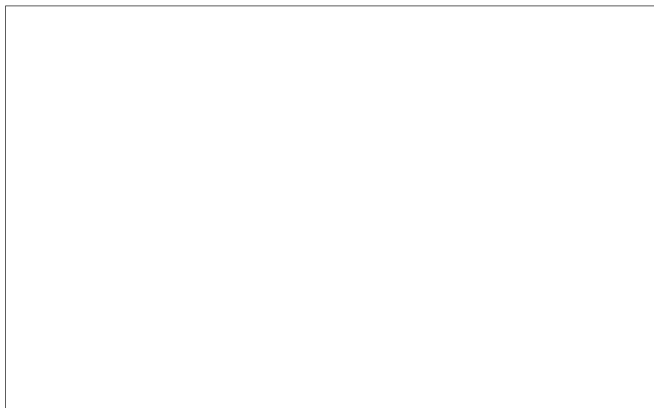
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Khomeini's self-confidence and determination have been demonstrated over the past 20 years. In the 1960s and 1970s his confrontational style was often denigrated by his opponents and rivals as self-indulgent and careless of the safety of his followers, who suffered imprisonment and torture. By 1978, however, Khomeini's intransigence had become a virtue as he faced down the Shah. Quietists like Shariat-Madari—who remained in Iran to mediate on behalf of their flocks—on the other hand, were tainted with "treason."

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Khomeini's image capitalizes, in particular, on the implication that—like the 12 Imams—he has access to wisdom beyond that of ordinary men. Khomeini's own writings suggest that he may want to be seen as the "renovator" who comes in each new age to purify Islam, according to Shia tradition. This image is reinforced by the coincidence that he came to power in 1979, the beginning of a new century and millennium in the Islamic calendar. Khomeini's association with mysticism strengthens his followers' suggestions that he receives guidance from God, the Prophet, or the Imams at night while meditating. Khomeini's ascetic lifestyle—another characteristic of the Imams—is used to deflect allegations that he has sought power for personal gain, but articles in the Iranian media show that it does not prevent opponents from attacking the much-improved lifestyle of his now-powerful former students.



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Analysis of Khomeini's books and speeches shows that he has used two styles of expression to advance his ideas. Until Islamic Government was issued in the early 1970s, he appeared to favor well-organized oral and written statements in scholarly, but clear, language. Since then, however, Khomeini has relied on less structured oral appeals in colloquial Farsi targeted on the lower classes and the emotions of Iranians as a whole. The texts show that he uses repetition, rhythm, exaggerated images, and cutting political jokes to drive his message home and alters his vocabulary—but not his delivery—to show increased emotion. His monotone exerts a hypnotic effect that is heightened by supporters placed among the audience to lead chanted slogans.

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Shias believe a mystic must have great self-control to avoid seduction by evil, according to Islamic scholars. A cleric who studied with Khomeini for many years says that the Ayatollah has tried to eliminate all emotion in his thoughts and actions.



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Table 1
Key Dates in Ayatollah Khomeini's Career

c. 1900	Born in Khomeyn, near Qom, into poor clerical family . . . father killed by officials of the Qajar Shah soon afterward.
1921	To Qom for advanced theological studies under leading quietist ayatollah . . . met senior clerics there who had fled British "oppression" in Iraq.
1938-48	Taught in Qom seminary . . . made classes relevant to contemporary events.
Early 1940s	First book, <i>Discovery of Secrets</i> , critical of Pahlavi rule, but did not advocate overthrow of the regime.
Mid-1950s	Became an aide to dominant jurispudent, Borujerdi, who was a quietist . . . with Shariat-Madari revised Qom curriculum.
1961	One of several contenders to become dominant Shia jurispudent.
1963	Prominent in opposition to Shah's programs . . . arrested and imprisoned.
October 1964	Exiled to Turkey.
October 1965	Moved to seminary at An Najaf, Iraq.
c. 1970	Second book, <i>Islamic Government</i> , advocated theocracy, but not rule by a single "guardian cleric" . . . style of expression shifted almost exclusively to appeals to Iranian emotions, rather than reason.
1977	Eldest son, Mostafa, died in An Najaf . . . allegedly killed by Shah's security service.
January 1978	Iranian Government press campaign tried to discredit him as a "foreign agent" . . . protest marches began the Islamic Revolution.
October 1978	Expelled from Iraq to Paris.
February 1979	Assumed power in Iran.
December 1979	Enshrined in the constitution as the sole guardian jurispudent at the head of the Islamic Republic.

[Redacted]

then in Iran from the 1920s to the mid-1950s. Kashani was especially prominent in Iranian political affairs during the Mossadeq era, first as a supporter, then as an opponent of Mossadeq. [Redacted]

According to a Western scholar, Khomeini apparently concluded that one of the reasons Kashani did not achieve greater political success was that he lacked



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Figure 4. Ayatollah Kashani (c. 1882-1962). [redacted]

the clerical credentials needed to rally the people and to limit opposition from quietist clerics, whom Khomeini calls "false saints." Kashani, on the other hand, believed Khomeini too intransigent for a career as a political activist, [redacted]

The ideology and programs of the Khomeini regime echo Kashani's calls for Iranian control of natural resources, opposition to foreign influences, "export of the revolution," and worldwide Muslim self-help organizations to combat imperialism. Tehran has also adopted Kashani's desire to "free" all peoples colonized or dominated by the great powers so they could use their national resources to improve their own lives. [redacted]

Records of Kashani's statements show that—like pro-Khomeini clerics—he evoked the martyred Third Imam as a model Muslim who "preferred death with honor (as an activist fighting oppression) to life with shame (quietism)." Kashani's calls for clerical involvement in political affairs have been echoed by Khomeini. [redacted]

**Clerical Credentials of
Ayatollah Khomeini and His Mentor**

Shia clerics are traditionally judged by their lineage, education (where, with whom, how long), and publications, [redacted]

The establishment of religious institutions is also important but requires a substantial income. Political savvy in the broadest sense and popular appeal play roles in determining how much money clerics receive from followers. Senior clerics under the Pahlavis often managed millions of dollars a year without accountability. [redacted]

Clerical biographic registers show that Khomeini has produced an acceptable, but not outstanding, number of publications on a variety of theological subjects, and that Kashani wrote no texts and never taught at a seminary. Kashani founded a school at An Najaf at which Islamic studies, science, and paramilitary techniques were taught. Khomeini founded no religious institutions before he came to power. Both Kashani and Khomeini studied with some of the best instructors, and Khomeini taught at Qom and at An Najaf, Iraq, the leading Shia seminaries. The clerical registers trace the ancestry of both men back no further than a generation or two. Khomeini's elevation to the rank of ayatollah was delayed, according to a cleric at Qom, because of his interest in mysticism—which is looked on askance by senior clerics but fascinates lay Iranians. [redacted]

In the 1950s and early 1960s Khomeini, alone among senior instructors in Qom, consistently related his lectures to current affairs, according to histories of modern Iran. He held regular meetings with other middle-level clerics there to discuss politics. Several clerics and laymen who now hold or have held high office in the Khomeini regime also participated in public seminars in Tehran on the nature of clerical leadership and responses to modern challenges. [redacted]

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Published accounts of the talks in Tehran contain conclusions that later became key goals of Khomeini's Islamic Republic:

- Creation of a Shia society requires popular acceptance that the clergy have inherited much of the Imams' God-given legal knowledge.
- A permanent clerical council must be formed to issue collective, definitive interpretations of religious law.
- The collective will of the community that "good should be enforced and evil be forbidden" must be reestablished, that is, religious law should define the society.
- Muslim youth must be indoctrinated with a renewed sense of Islamic responsibility.
- The clerical establishment must remain financially independent of the state. [redacted]

In the 1950s Khomeini became an aide to grand Ayatollah Borujerdi, the dominant cleric and a quietist. We believe this allowed Khomeini to develop wide contacts within the religious and bazaar networks—expanded and rationalized by Borujerdi—that later supported Khomeini during the revolution and under the Islamic Republic. Khomeini was allowed by Borujerdi to deemphasize Shia penal codes and rituals in the Qom curriculum and to add courses designed to develop an interest in political and social responsibility among the seminarians. He shared this responsibility with another middle-level cleric named Shariat-Madari, a quietist who had probably already emerged as Khomeini's philosophical rival. When Borujerdi died in 1961, he left Khomeini in charge of his assets, which we believe Khomeini almost certainly used to advance students and teachers sympathetic to his own ideas.⁶ [redacted]

Into the Political Spotlight

Within three years after the death of Borujerdi, Khomeini had become leader of the activist clerics opposed to the Pahlavi regime. Khomeini first gained

⁶ Ayatollah Shariat-Madari is, like Khomeini, a "grand" ayatollah. Throughout the revolution, Shariat-Madari hoped to arrange for a constitutional monarchy. Later, he was an outspoken critic of the Khomeini regime and was a major force in diluting some of the more radical proposals of the pro-Khomeini clerics. Shariat-Madari became a focus of many Islamic-oriented opposition groups and was "defrocked" by activist clerics in 1982 after he allegedly failed to inform security forces of a coup plot. [redacted]

prominence beyond Qom when he was one of several candidates to succeed Borujerdi. Histories of modern Iran indicate that he won significant support from bazaar merchants because he was perceived as more strongly opposed than other contenders to the Shah's economic policies, which were causing a recession. This alliance with the bazaar resulted in the sizable contributions—possibly millions of dollars a month—that Khomeini used to support his followers during the anti-Shah movement in the 1960s and 1970s. [redacted]

*Look at the seminaries. You see negligent, lazy, idle, and apathetic people who do nothing but discuss law and offer prayers . . . Do not picture clerics in some corner in Qom or An Najaf studying questions on childbirth and menstruation instead of concerning themselves with politics and draw the conclusion that religion must be separate from politics.*⁷ [redacted]

*Islam is based on politics.*⁸ [redacted]

The clerics could not agree on a new leader to succeed Borujerdi; hence, no superior emerged to prevent Khomeini's entry into the political arena. He did so with relish, and by 1962 he had begun to expound the first comprehensive "Islamic" alternative to the Shah's program. [redacted]

Largely because of Khomeini's activism, 1963 was a watershed year in clerical-state relations in Iran. The Shah confronted senior clerics in Qom and made clear that he would tolerate no rivals for authority. The mainly quietist clergy first called on their followers to demonstrate but later tried to negotiate a compromise. They hoped to convince the Shah to form a council of jurists to review legislation and grant other forms of official recognition that Islam and the clergy would have a meaningful role in Iran as it was modernized under the Pahlavis. Many feared that full-scale opposition to the Shah would be exploited by the left. [redacted]

⁷ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*. [redacted]

⁸ Ayatollah Khomeini, 1983. [redacted]

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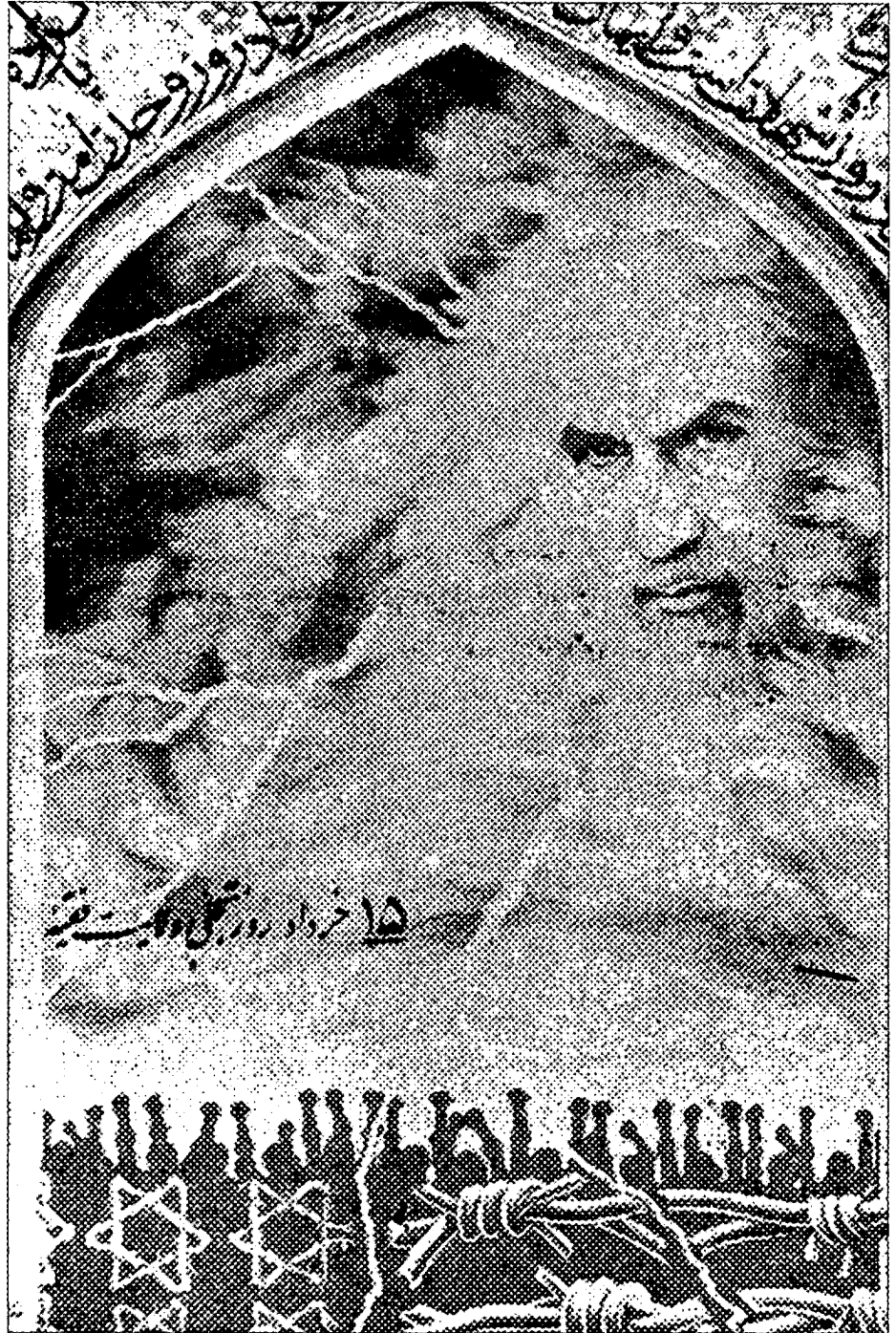
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Figure 5. Poster commemorating the 20th anniversary of Khomeini's emergence into the national political arena (1963-83). Its design is one that is offensive to quietist clerics who reject activist elevation of Khomeini to a special position among clerics.



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The small faction of activists, led by Khomeini, was bolder. Contemporary accounts show that the activists argued for major changes in the Shah's regime and, ultimately, for his replacement by an Islamic government. Their well-publicized views and activities prevented the quietist religious establishment from reaching an accommodation with the Shah. [redacted]

When Khomeini was arrested in 1963, protest demonstrations erupted throughout Iran and were forcefully put down. Khomeini had become a national hero. His popularity grew even though he was exiled the next year. His followers kept him in the forefront of the anti-Shah protests by smuggling tapes of his speeches into Iran where they were reproduced and widely circulated [redacted]

Evolution of Khomeini's Thought

Khomeini's books and speeches show that over the past 30 years he has moved from a toleration of imperfect secular Iranian institutions to a preoccupation with uncompromising opposition to any threat he perceives to Islam. To defend Islam, he has reinterpreted Shia dogma to support extreme activism—the total involvement of clerics in politics as a religious duty. In the process, he and his supporters have created a doctrine so radical that, as one Western scholar has written, if Khomeini lives long enough to preside over its institutionalization, Shiism as it has been known in Iran will come to an end. [redacted]

*A decayed government is better than no government at all. The practical power of the jurists excludes the government. Even when rulers are oppressive and against the people, the clergy will not try to destroy them.*⁹ [redacted]

In his first book—*Discovery of Secrets*, published in the 1940s—Khomeini argued that a new social and political structure alien to Islam was being created in Iran. Instead of responding to individual issues as his predecessors had done, Khomeini tried to deal comprehensively with how the clerics, as guardians of Islamic values, should respond. The book did not advocate the Shah's ouster but called instead for a constitutional monarchy that would respect religious law by allowing clerical review of all legislation.

⁹ Khomeini, *Discovery of Secrets*. [redacted]

Under such a system, Khomeini wrote, the ruler would be chosen by an "assembly" of religious jurists, and the legislature would be composed of clerics or "at least supervised by them." Peacetime armed forces would be made up of pious volunteers, and, if Iran were attacked, all able-bodied males would respond to a call for holy war from an Islamic propaganda ministry. This idea presaged Iran's reliance on the Revolutionary Guard and militia troops for much of its manpower in the war with Iraq as well as the regime's creation of an Islamic Guidance Ministry to direct internal and external propaganda. [redacted]

Khomeini's more famous work—*Islamic Government*—was compiled around 1970. In it, Khomeini repeated themes from his first book and anti-Pahlavi speeches, but he also called for theocracy and abrogation of parts of the 1906 constitution. The book asserted the right of senior clerics to rule as "guardian jurists," but it did not allude to a single cleric in a supreme position such as Khomeini now occupies in the Islamic Republic. The text also did not mention the word "republic." The term was included in the official name of the new Iranian regime at the insistence of Shariat-Madari and other quietist clerics opposed to the more radical aspects of Khomeinism, according to Western scholars with good contacts among the quietist clerics. [redacted]

*Islamic government is neither tyrannical nor absolute, but constitutional. It is not constitutional in the current sense of the word—based on approval of laws in accordance with majority opinion. It is constitutional in the sense that rulers are subject to a certain set of conditions in governing that are set forth in the Koran and the traditions of the Prophet and of the Imams.*¹⁰ [redacted]

Islamic Government is not a clear blueprint of a theocratic structure or its policies in the Western sense.¹¹ In Khomeini's view, religious law has defined

¹⁰ Ayatollah Khomeini, 1978. [redacted]
¹¹ The best translation is Hamid Algar's in *Islam and Revolution: Writings of Imam Khomeini*, Mizan Press, Berkeley, 1981. [redacted]

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all but the minor details of government, "like traffic laws, which are beneath the dignity of Islam to consider." Religious law covers, for example, national policy, commercial codes, and personal hygiene, as well as prayer. Islam, as Khomeini sees it, has an answer for any problem, in any age. Because they are derived from the word of God, the religious laws of Shiism must be perfect. The question, therefore, is not to bring Islam into line with the modern world, but rather the reverse. [redacted]

*Let them erect a wall around Iran and confine us inside. We prefer this to the doors being open and plunderers pouring in. Why should we want a civilization which is worse than savagery? Is this civilization?*¹² [redacted]

Khomeini's books and speeches show that he believes all Muslims now confront a fundamental identity crisis that threatens the existence of Islam. He says this alienation is primarily caused by "westoxication"—a fascination with Western culture that creates a sense of inferiority and helplessness among Muslims. Khomeini borrowed the term from a popular lay thinker and the concept from Ayatollah Kashani. He writes that the only effective response is to enforce a social order in Iran that defines both public and private attitudes in accordance with Islamic law. This, he believes, will produce a unity of thought and action focused on Islam that will give Muslims the "faith" needed to defeat their oppressors. [redacted]

To achieve this in Iran, Khomeini proposes to return Shiism to the ideal revolutionary system that he believes was abandoned after the Prophet Muhammad and the First Imam. Strong clerical leadership is the keystone of his program. "Know that it is your duty to establish an Islamic government," he told his students in *Islamic Government*. [redacted]

*Since the rule of Islam is the rule of law, only the jurists, and no one else, should be in charge of government. They are the ones who can govern as God ordained.*¹³ [redacted]

¹² Ayatollah Khomeini, June 1980. [redacted]

¹³ Khomeini, *Islamic Government*. [redacted]

Khomeini asserts that supreme political and religious leadership by a "guardian cleric"—or *velayat-e faqih*—is inherited from the Prophet and the First Imam, who had complete political and religious authority. The jurists are their heirs and must be obeyed completely. Khomeini emphasizes in his book that the "faith" of the early Shia leaders allowed them to actively struggle for the state of well-being God intended for man. He wants contemporary Iranians to show the way to other Muslims by taking up the same struggle. [redacted]

Implementing all-inclusive religious law involves, according to Khomeini, narrowing the bounds of acceptable behavior to force Iranians to embody a pure revolutionary Islamic faith. Khomeini is adamant about the rigorous application of religious law under the Islamic Republic to accomplish this goal. [redacted]

The "unity" for which Khomeini has been calling with increasing insistence in his speeches over the past four and a half years denotes, we believe, rigid ideological conformity intended to reproduce his conception of the ideal milieu of early Islam. Accounts in the Iranian media show that some of Khomeini's strongest opponents among the Iranian clergy—mainly quietists—firmly believe that the Twelfth Imam will return to create the only just government possible on Earth during a time of extraordinary chaos. They see Khomeini's efforts as preventing those events. These accounts also show that extreme Khomeinists, on the other hand, are beginning to suggest that if everyone would just cooperate with the regime, the return of the Twelfth Imam—the Mahdi—might not be necessary. [redacted]

Khomeini writes that Iranians must individually wage an internal battle with their instincts in order to become good Muslims. As the guardian jurist, Khomeini shows them through his words and actions the way they must think and behave. When they have conquered themselves, he says, citizens of the Islamic state are ready to take on all external enemies of Islam. Khomeini apparently dismisses the possibility [redacted]

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that strict application of religious law under clerical guidance will not produce the nationwide community of purpose that he wants. [redacted]

Khomeini's statements focus on the "oppressed" lower classes as those best qualified to become citizens and officials of an Islamic regime and to reap the greatest benefits from its programs. In Khomeini's view, the lower classes remain relatively untainted by Western influence. They are, therefore, open to developing the "faith" needed to create an ideal theocratic state. Although he has publicly acknowledged that Iran needs persons with expertise in many fields, Khomeini's statements make clear that those who do not receive their training at an Islamic institution cannot really be trusted. We believe he has virtually written off the upper classes. [redacted]

The Islamic state—like Islam itself—is a gift from God, according to Khomeini. His books and speeches make clear that dissent is unacceptable and incomprehensible in Khomeinism, except as a manifestation of foreign influence or evil conspiracies designed to perpetuate "oppression" in Iran. When Khomeini refers to the United States as the "great satan," he means that US opposition to the Islamic Republic is a part of the work of the devil that the United States does in Iran and around the world. To Khomeini, those Iranians who oppose the guardian cleric's regime are failures as individuals and—using terms that originated in 14th-century Shia theocracies—are "waging war on God" and "corrupt on Earth." This view contrasts with the traditional Shia refusal to consider any judgment final, according to academic experts on Shia Islam. [redacted]

Foreign Policy. The Islamic state's relationships with other nations are a major element of Khomeini's ideology. His book of guidelines for daily living which all ayatollahs issue to their followers contains an essay on foreign contacts in place of the standard discussion of "holy" war. [redacted]

In it Khomeini demands that Shias defend their political and economic integrity at any cost against all real and potential foreign infringements. He orders religious leaders and believers to force a ruler to cut off all ties with a state that represents such a threat. [redacted]

All our problems stem from these foreigners from the West, and from America at the moment." [redacted]

Khomeini has consistently advocated a policy independent of the East and West. But when he specifically addresses "ending foreign domination of Iran," he makes clear that some nations, or "satans"—such as the United States, United Kingdom, and USSR, which have "enslaved" Iran in the past—will have difficulty maintaining relations with an Islamic government under his guidance. His speeches also show suspicion of Iran's neighbors and strong antipathy toward Israel. [redacted]

We believe one of the reasons for Khomeini's intransigence over continuation of the war with Iraq is that he has stated publicly that the "faith" of the "martyrs" at the front is all that is needed for victory. Another is his elevation of Iraqi President Saddam Husayn as a symbol of the oppressive forces that face the Islamic Republic. His recent remarks show that the struggle with Iraq has become, in his mind, one between good and evil. He is, therefore, likely to insist on fighting on lest he undermine his concept of the mystical power of Islamic "faith." [redacted]

Khomeini and his supporters also have stated publicly that they have a religious duty to "export" their ideology to all peoples—especially Muslims—who are "oppressed by Eastern or Western imperialism." Islam, as God's word, is applicable universally, not just in Iran. Logically then, any activist-led regime in Tehran must have a reformist, even revolutionary, attitude toward "un-Islamic" governments in the region it sees as corrupt tools of the West. It would also feel dutybound to spread its concepts worldwide. We believe Khomeini and other activists see no clear distinction between "export of the revolution" and normal diplomatic practice. [redacted]

Economic Theory. Khomeini's definition of clerical guardianship in *Islamic Republic* gives the leader of an Islamic state the same powers over national wealth

¹⁴ Ayatollah Khomeini, October 1979. [redacted]

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as a guardian has over a ward's assets. But he has never provided clear guidelines on Islamic economics, and only one cleric close to him, Ayatollah Baqr Sadr, has published an economic analysis claiming to be comprehensive. Neither suggests ways of translating a doctrine designed for a preindustrial society into guidelines for a modern economy tied to an international economic system. The economic policies of the Khomeini regime are, in fact, unsystematic and arbitrary, according to Western economists who have studied Tehran's policies. Very little can be described as exclusively Islamic.¹⁵ [redacted]

*I do not believe that any prudent individual can believe that the purpose of all these sacrifices was to have less expensive melons. No one would give his life for better agriculture.*¹⁶ [redacted]

Ayatollah Baqr Sadr's book, like Khomeini's, ascribes broad economic powers to the Islamic state, which Baqr Sadr wrote is "chosen by God to take charge of the people's affairs." His book asserts that the state owns, organizes, and spends state and public properties and revenues, taxes the private sector, lends assets to the "oppressed," and can nationalize private property. In matters not explicitly raised in the Shia sacred texts, Baqr Sadr writes that the government can even take action contrary to established traditions of the Prophet and Imams.¹⁷ [redacted]

Such moves—called expediencies in Shia terminology—have often been made or suggested by members of the Khomeini regime. They are a primary source of continued opposition by senior quietist clerics who have put distance between themselves and the Islamic Republic. Public statements by such clerics show that Khomeini's opponents see these "expediencies" as heresy. We believe the major point of conflict is the radical Khomeinists' rejection of the traditional Islamic recognition of private property. [redacted]

¹⁶ Ayatollah Khomeini, late 1979. [redacted]

¹⁷ Ayatollah Baqr Sadr, an influential activist cleric in An Najaf, was executed by the Iraqi Government in 1980. His book, *Our Economics*, published in 1961, was considered incomprehensible by most clerics in Qom. [redacted] One of Baqr Sadr's sons now leads an Iraqi government-in-exile sponsored by the Khomeini regime. [redacted]

Conflict Over the Form of an Islamic Regime

The Iranian clerical establishment is now engaged in an internal struggle over the nature of Shiism in Iran, we believe. The continued—and perhaps intensified—divisions between activist and quietist clerics have been reflected in the institutions and programs of the Islamic Republic. Clerics who control the regime have excluded their leftist and Westernized lay rivals while co-opting their most popular ideas. But these maneuvers have made the regime exclusively "Islamic." Hence, guidelines in all matters must be defined in terms of religious law. Yet the activists and quietists cannot reach agreement, both because Shia texts are open to many interpretations and because of long-standing personal, geographic, class, and generational rivalries within the clerical community. [redacted]

We see the constitution of the Islamic Republic and official or quasi-official institutions created under the clerics as a mix of the activists' and quietists' often contradictory ideological principles.¹⁸

- The official name of the Islamic Republic was a compromise, according to Western scholars. Khomeini agreed to add "republic" but refused to allow forms of government other than his Islamic regime to be offered for public acceptance in a referendum. He also insisted on a new "Islamic" constitution, based on religious law, drafted by an Assembly of Experts.
- Religious law was enshrined in the constitution as the basis of the government and of all national and individual activity, but there was no firm agreement over who would have the final word on its interpretation. A "Council of Guardians" composed of clerical and lay experts was empowered to review all legislation for compatibility with Shia doctrine.

¹⁸ Good translations include those in *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Pars Associates, Tehran, 1980; and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS-MEA-79-236 supp. 034, 6 December 1979. [redacted]

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Because senior ayatollahs are free to interpret Shia laws independently, clerics on the Council who have quietist tendencies have been able to sidetrack legislation pushed by activist clerics. Accounts in the Iranian press indicate, moreover, that the regime is still attempting to draft a national legal code based on religious law that is acceptable to all factions.

- The executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government were made subject to direct clerical supervision and control. But under the quasi-official komiteh system and mosque networks, which permeate all levels of activity, quietist clerics who want decentralization and oppose direct involvement in political affairs can act as a brake on others who are more activist and want a centralized government under direct clerical control.

*"The best article of the constitution is on leadership of the guardian cleric. People gathered and shouted and demanded that the clergy have a role in government. The role of the clergy is to control affairs. Islam does not allow the guardian cleric to utter one lie or take one step in the wrong direction."*¹⁹

- Leadership by a single supreme guardian cleric or a small leadership council—*velayat-e faqih*—was also enshrined in the constitution. Khomeini alone embodies the principle as the activists prefer. Quietist clerics who favor collective authority, however, included a provision for a small council to serve when a single outstanding cleric is not available.
- The "leader" was given sweeping powers over the three branches of government and named commander in chief of the armed forces. The next article of the constitution, however, asserts the quietist principle that national affairs must be managed by reliance on public opinion through elections and referendums. The preamble, moreover, calls for the involvement of every citizen in "all stages of political and fateful decisionmaking."

¹⁹ Ayatollah Khomeini, December 1979.

- Both the regular Army and the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard were included in the constitution as defenders, respectively, of "independence, territorial integrity, and the Islamic Republic" and of the "revolution." Statements by influential clerics show that quietists who favor lay government tend to support the interests of the regular forces—properly "Islamicized." Activists, on the other hand, want the pious volunteers of the Guard to be the only armed force. Khomeini vacillates. In early 1983 he announced that the regular forces "would be with us until the end of time," but he had earlier supported activists who wanted to eliminate the regular forces.

In domestic policy the regime has often been hamstrung by conflict between the activists and quietists over how to apply religious law to modern problems, we believe. Statements by leading clerics indicate that they agree on using Iranian resources on behalf of the Iranian people, developing domestic capabilities to exploit those resources, and bettering the lives of the "oppressed" lower classes while creating a society impervious to outside influences. But activists and quietists are at odds over how best to accomplish these goals. Land and urban housing reform as well as trade nationalization are the most obvious examples of activist legislation that has been stymied by quietist strict-constructionist clerics.

In foreign policy, the activists have been more successful, perhaps because their agenda does not strike so directly at the personal interests of the quietist clerics and their constituents. Accounts in the Iranian press show that quietist pressures have, however, overcome activist reluctance to crack down on the Tudeh Communist Party and put distance between Iran and the USSR. Iran now has cut or severely limited ties with both Eastern and Western "satans"—the United States, the United Kingdom, and the USSR—that it perceives as actual or potential threats to its interests.

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Statements by leading clerics in the Iranian media indicate general agreement on seeking alliances with states—primarily in the Third World—that are opposed to “imperialism,” and on proposing Muslim and Third World cooperation and mutual assistance against “Eastern and Western imperialism.” But the clerics sharply disagree over methods and targets for “exporting the revolution,” in part because activists and quietists cannot agree on what the basic message should be. Quietists tend to support nonviolent activities compatible with traditional Muslim practice, while many activists believe that the fusion of religion and politics in Khomeinism justifies any means of spreading their ideology. These clerics have taken the lead in Iran’s cooperation with a wide range of dissident groups throughout the world.

The Current Clerical Debate

We believe the longstanding debate between the Shia activists and quietists is now centered on the succession to Khomeini and the types of Islamic government each group envisages for Iran. Two leading rival systems can be symbolized by two phrases, derived from Shia doctrine, that the clerics have often used interchangeably to describe the Islamic regime they want.

One term, *velayat-e faqih* (leadership by a religious jurispudent), is emphasized by the activists around Khomeini. It is particularly evocative of their view of the Shia Imams. *Velayat* means rule or guardianship but has an added connotation of sanctity. It symbolizes the emotional commitment of inferiors to superiors, such as a child to its father or the believer to God. This concept taps some of the strongest social and emotional bonds in Iranian society. Relations between equals are perceived by Iranians as unstable and demanding,

and are difficult for them to sustain rationally.

The other term is *hokumat-e eslami* (Islamic government), which has been associated with quietist tendencies. Nevertheless, it is also the term Khomeini used as the title of his second book. *Hokumat-e eslami* is associated with the Shia tradition of jurisprudence.

Table 2
Two Forms of Islamic Government
Advocated by Iranian Clerics

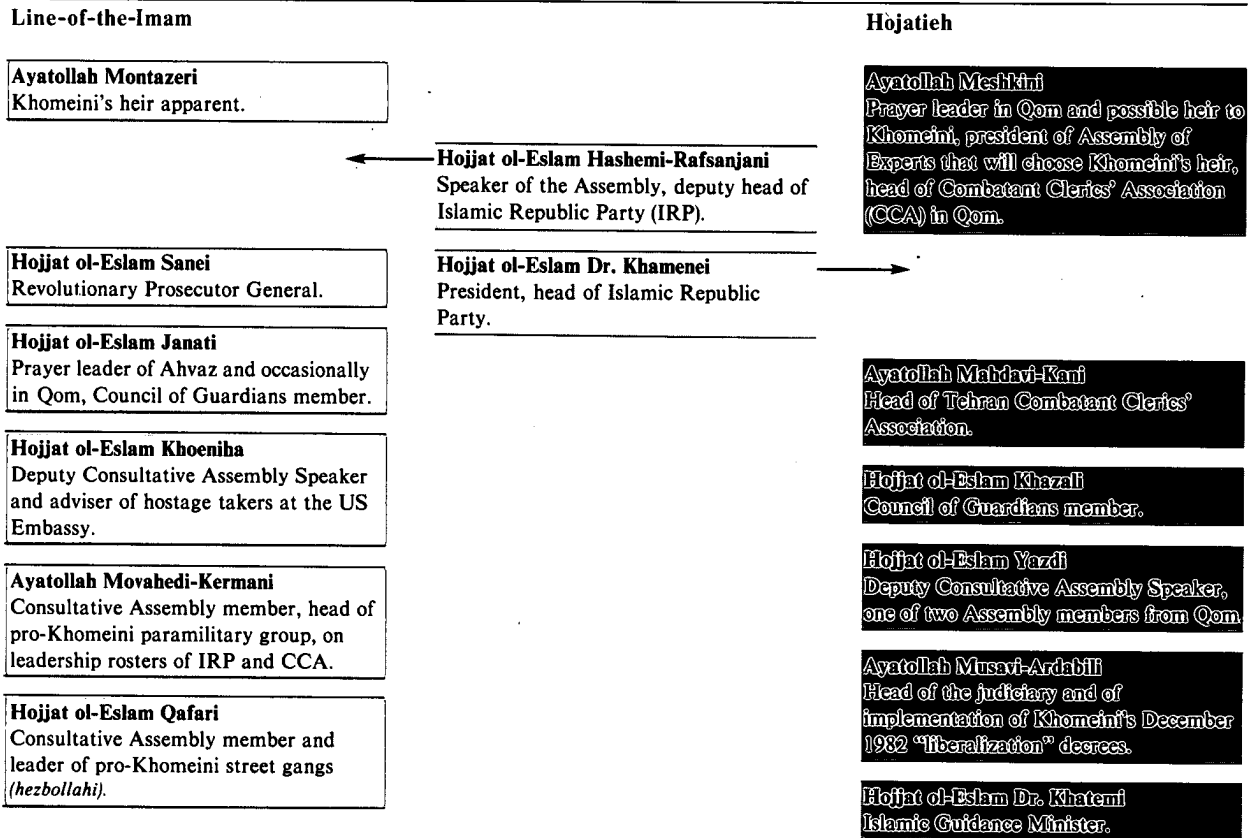
Velayat-e Faqih (Rule by a Religious Jurispudent)	Hokumat-e Eslami (Islamic Government)
Now associated with Line-of-the-Imam faction; its major organ is the Islamic Republic Party	Now associated with the Hojatieh faction; its major organ is the Combatant Clerics' Association
Strong theocracy; centralized power; no significant dissent allowed; autocratic	Lay government, clerical supervision; decentralized; disagreement and clerical specialization allowed; consensual
Single supreme leader linked to infallible Imams and symbolically to God; officials and populace inferior to leader; succession by mandate from predecessor	Supervision by clerics tied to fallible jurisprudents and legal tradition; status of clerics, people, and officials balanced; succession by consensus
Limited popular participation and scope for legislature; popular allegiance based on emotion	Popular participation and broader scope for legislature; allegiance based on reason
Inflexible, likely to make demands; unanimity stressed	Flexible; inclined to negotiate; follows majority opinion
God is the ruler of the world; temporal government must be based on His revealed laws and be supervised by religious jurisprudents; clerics are allowed to use their own reasoning capacities, based on their accumulated expertise, to interpret doctrines in Shia texts and apply them to contemporary issues.	

Hokumat means control and order derived from legal powers based on human rationality.

The clerical establishment can now be described as split into two amorphous groups based in part on these two views of government. These factions are about equal in influence, but there are far more quietists than activists. The factions are called Khat-e Imam (Line-of-the-Imam [Khomeini]) and Hojatieh (a reference to the Hidden Imam—Mahdi).²⁰ The Line-of-the-Imam tends to be activist and the Hojatieh quiet-

²⁰ The Line-of-the-Imam faction is sometimes referred to as *Maktabi* (a reference to the Islamic equivalent of elementary school that implies correctness of political views).

Figure 6
Factional Distribution of Selected Clerics
in the Khomeini Regime^a



← Tendency toward

Notes: These characterizations should not be considered definitive. It is easier to outline broad divisions among the Iranian clerics than to link individuals to them with confidence. Clerical ties overlap and are often opportunistic. Alliances have formed and reformed over the past four years, depending on the issue and Khomeini's position. Iranians tend not to be troubled by shifting alliances and simultaneous participation in groups with opposing ideologies and goals, according to Western researchers.

Clerical views, moreover, are obscured by another factor. The unique Shia doctrine of *taqiyyeh* or "dissimulation" sanctions lying about beliefs when it benefits the Shia community. Recent Hojati statements in favor of leadership by a single guardian cleric and mutual praise by Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani and President Khamenei—who are rivals—are probably examples of such dissimulation.



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ist, but these distinctions are not rigid.²¹ Khomeini has helped perpetuate divisions within the clergy, even while calling on all clerics to support his regime and stop bickering in public, [redacted]
[redacted] We believe he does this partly to preserve his own preeminence. But he apparently also realizes that none of the clerical leaders would implement fully his ideal of the Islamic Republic. [redacted]

The Line-of-the-Imam has tended to emphasize the more revolutionary aspects of Iran's Islamic Revolution, [redacted] It has co-opted leftist programs, including land reform and central control of industry and trade. The faction favors good relations with Moscow and anti-imperialist forces worldwide as a means of striking out against the West. We think radical members of the faction were responsible for the hostage taking at the US Embassy in 1979. Members of this faction should not, however, be regarded as simply pro-Soviet or even sympathetic toward Communism. Khomeini and most of its leaders view the USSR as an imperialist "satan" and a threat to the Islamic Republic, [redacted]
[redacted]

Public statements by members of the Line-of-the-Imam faction show that they want a single cleric to succeed Khomeini to continue undiluted the centralization of power in one religious leader whose extraordinary qualifications legitimize the regime. Some clerics, such as Assembly Speaker Rafsanjani, who are too junior to succeed Khomeini alone or to win easily a place on a leadership council, have supported the faction on Khomeini's succession, [redacted]
[redacted] They and faction members hope to preserve their power after Khomeini dies by installing a successor they can influence. [redacted]

²¹ The term Hojatieh is used generically in this paper to indicate clerics who wish to moderate some of the more wide-ranging changes proposed by other pro-Khomeini clerics. The name may be derived from a theologically conservative, anti-Bahai group formed in the 1950s—called the Hojatieh Society—or from a title of the Hidden Imam (*hojat* or "proof") used to symbolize opposition to enshrining Khomeini as a charismatic leader. Some individuals associated with the Hojatieh Society may be associated with the current Hojatieh faction, but the most influential factional members may have had no ties to the Society. The Hojatieh Society's political activities in 1983 were criticized obliquely by Khomeini for causing divisions within the clergy. The Society announced in July that it would no longer sponsor public activities. [redacted]

They are currently backing Ayatollah Montazeri, regarded by many Iranians as Khomeini's own choice as successor. Montazeri has spoken out in favor of continued war with Iraq and export of the revolution. But his statements show that he is also strongly anti-Soviet. Montazeri has suggested publicly that ties with the United States are theoretically possible. We believe, however, that no Iranian cleric will advocate actually opening contacts with the United States until the regime is certain of its ability to retain control in Iran. Montazeri is a far less austere and intransigent personality than Khomeini, [redacted]
[redacted]

The other faction, the Hojatis, has tended to focus on the religious aspects of the revolution, [redacted]
[redacted] It has the sympathy of all of the grand ayatollahs and of influential clerics at the Qom seminary. President Khamenei—a rival of Speaker Rafsanjani—has publicly supported its views on the succession.²² The Hojatis emphasize the need to legitimize the government by implementing religious law as the penal code and guide for everyday activity. [redacted] they believe that direct clerical intervention in secular affairs should be limited—a major quietist tenet. We believe they were largely responsible for Khomeini's decree late last year that called for more humane social policies and played an important role in the crackdown on the Tudeh Communist Party and Soviet activities in Iran. Some emphasize their religious duty to "export the revolution." [redacted]

Iranian press accounts show that Hojatis oppose major economic reforms sponsored by the Imamism that are similar to the proposals of leftist Iranian

²² In addition to Khomeini, the grand ayatollahs in Iran are Golpayegani, Marashi-Najafi, and Shariat-Madari in Qom and Shirazi in Mashhad. Khomeini's supporters claim that his superiority to all other ayatollahs warrants him the title of Imam. Backers of Ayatollah Montazeri as Khomeini's successor refer to him as a grand ayatollah, but none of the other grand ayatollahs—including Khomeini—has ever recognized his claim to the title. Grand Ayatollah Khoi, in An Najaf, Iraq, is reported [redacted] to be close to the Hojatieh. A remark he made in 1970, disparaging Khomeini's theories on clerical involvement in politics, inspired the series of lectures that became Khomeini's book, *Islamic Republic*. [redacted]

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groups. They also reject close ties to Communist or radical regimes, whether Muslim or not. They want to use Western technology in rebuilding the Iranian economy, but, like the Imamis, they are wary of the impact of Western influences in Iran. [redacted]

Hojatis want Khomeini to be succeeded by a council of three to five senior jurists, which would presumably include some of their sympathizers. They emphasize a Shia quietist tradition that vests authority in the clerical community rather than in an individual cleric. They accept Khomeini as the political and religious leader of the moment but refuse to accept any mystical link between him and early Muslim leaders. We believe Ayatollah Meshkini may be the Hojati candidate for the succession. He takes a hard line on the war with Iraq and is antileftist. [redacted]

Prospects

The course of the Islamic Republic depends to a large extent on how the clerics manage the succession to Khomeini, we believe. This is bound up in the long activist and quietist philosophical feud over the nature of Shiism and the clerics' intense personal rivalries. Both factions have begun to lay the groundwork for establishing that Shia dogma gives legitimacy to their views and for institutionalizing their programs after Khomeini's death, according to accounts in the Iranian media. [redacted]

As a practical matter, after Khomeini, the activist clerics will have to rely more heavily on coercion of the population to maintain their control. Khomeini, like other charismatic leaders, is irreplaceable. More than any other cleric, he symbolizes the aspirations of the revolution and an Islamic regime. We believe whether the clerics choose a single successor—and Montazeri is the most likely—or a leadership council, the post-Khomeini clerical leadership will not be able to evoke the same loyalties that Khomeini has commanded from the lower classes who are the mainstay of the regime. [redacted]

We see Montazeri as a transitional leader. His clerical credentials are insufficient to sustain a claim to be supreme political-religious leader, and his managerial

skills are disparaged by Iranians. A leadership council, on the other hand, whether serving as adviser to Montazeri or as successor to Khomeini would dilute the doctrine of guardianship as it has been applied to Khomeini. It would also undermine his calls for unity of thought among clerics. A council, however, would embody the collective leadership desired by the quietist Hojatis. [redacted]

We expect each clerical faction to try to impose its view as the authoritative interpretation of Khomeini's legacy. Iranian propaganda shows that activists are trying to popularize radical doctrinal interpretations that will ensure their dominance. They have also tried unsuccessfully to stage-manage the succession in advance. [redacted] They have maneuvered Montazeri into positions of responsibility delegated by Khomeini that are designed to make him seem the obvious heir. But Khomeini has also delegated similar responsibilities to Meshkini. [redacted]

We think the grand ayatollahs may well enter the succession process in an effort to modify the regime's ideology in favor of less clerical involvement in running the government. Just as Borujerdi's death in 1961 freed Khomeini and other anti-Shah activists, Khomeini's death would allow the grand ayatollahs, who are all generally quietist, to exert their own still-considerable influence over the Iranian people. [redacted]

They have stayed in the background for the most part since 1979, but recently grand Ayatollah Shirazi, ayatollahs in Mashhad and Esfahan, and possibly even grand Ayatollah Khoi have sponsored demonstrations against the government in Iranian cities, according to the Iranian media. We believe such activities, if sustained, would present a serious challenge to the activist clerics and would be especially threatening after Khomeini's death. In this regard, the succession process is a waiting game. If Khomeini, who is 83, can outlive his widely respected peers—all in their eighties or nineties—activists who back the doctrine of leadership of a guardian cleric will face less authoritative quietist challenges. [redacted]

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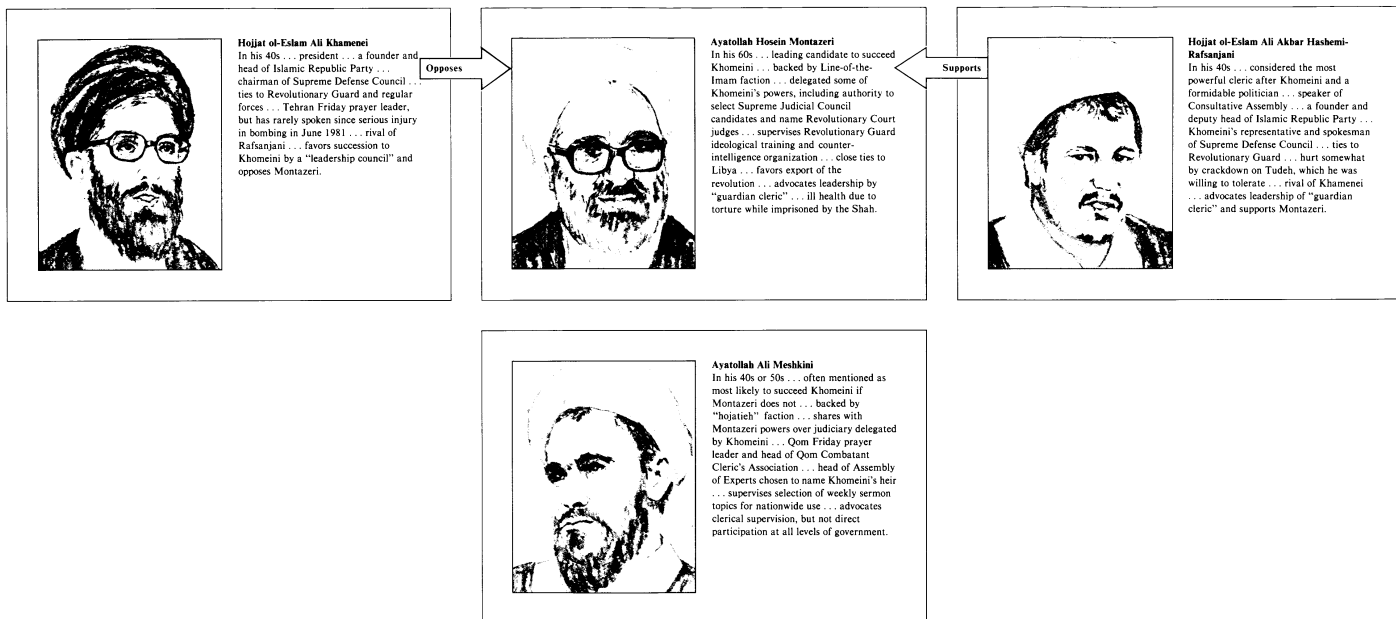
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Figure 7
Possible Successors to Khomeini



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We believe, however, that the advantage probably lies with the reassertion of quietist tendencies. Quietism has been strong in Shiism from its beginnings. Some scholars say it has been dominant since at least the 10th century even though quietists failed to stifle completely the politicized activist clerics. Activist Khomeinism only began to challenge the quietist tradition in the 1960s and has overshadowed it only since 1979. Khomeinism has not yet been institutionalized in Iran. Some popular clerics who were in the forefront of activist politicking against the Shah have joined quietists in opposing the Khomeini regime. Hence, the weight of time, tradition, and probably numbers still favors those who do not want an activist regime. [redacted]

Political opportunism and the theological and historical precedents that define clerical ideology encourage compromise among the clerics. But Shiism also has a tradition of violent clashes between rival clerical groups while one dominant faction is being replaced by another. We think such clashes could trigger wider violence that would threaten the stability of the Islamic Republic. The Iranian press has acknowledged a clash in Tehran in mid-June between followers of the Line-of-the-Imam and the Hojatieh Society, [redacted]

[redacted] The Iranian exile media has also suggested that some of the deaths of leading clerics over the past four years resulted not from attacks by opposition groups, but from rivalries within the theological community. [redacted]

Implications for the United States

The likelihood of continued clerical control in Iran after Khomeini has important implications for US interests. We believe the ground rules for Iranian ideology defined by Khomeinism dictate opposition to the United States. Ayatollah Montazeri, a strong activist, has suggested publicly that relations with the United States are theoretically possible, but none of the leading clerics is likely to feel secure enough in the near term after Khomeini's death to initiate contacts with Washington. Quietists who might try to reverse

Khomeini's anti-US course would be especially vulnerable to activist charges of treason on religious and nationalist grounds. [redacted]

While the debate among the clerical factions is being played out, the regime will remain highly ideological whatever the balance of power among the activists and quietists, [redacted]

[redacted] The clerical community is dominated by Shia historical precedents and religious laws that circumscribe the clerics' world view and regulate their policies. [redacted]

We do not expect any of the leaders of clerical factions to allow Iran to develop close ties with a superpower or to abandon Tehran's efforts to expand Iranian influence worldwide as a leader of the Third World:

- But the stronger the activists become, the more likely Iran is to seek contacts with the USSR, its allies, radical Third World regimes, and dissident groups worldwide. An activist regime will target, in particular, the Persian Gulf regimes, whose governments it sees as corrupt tools of the West. The activists will also focus on offsetting the perceived ability of the United States to manipulate international political and economic relationships and impose Western values on developing nations.
- Conversely, quietist strength is likely to create more openings for relationships—particularly economic ties—with the United States and other Western nations because of quietist appreciation of Western technology. But quietists are also wary of the impact on Iran of worldwide US influences. [redacted]

Thus, for the near term after Khomeini's death, we believe a clerical regime or an Islamic lay government backed by clerics is most likely to focus on marshaling its strength at home and abroad in opposition to the United States. In the process, its differences with the USSR are likely to receive less attention. While the Soviets probably would have little influence on Iranian policies after Khomeini, Moscow would continue to benefit indirectly from the clerics' aversion to Washington. [redacted]

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